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ABSTRACT

An evaluation was conducted of the service-learning-based Community Connection program at Baker Middle School in south Texas to determine whether the program is having an impact on student achievement, attendance, perception toward self, school, and community. Data were collected through a survey of a sample of 120 students from the target population of 8th grade students who participated in the Community Connection program during the 1999-2000 school year, along with a teacher survey and interviews with teachers and administrators, a literature review, site observations, and school records. The study found that the Community Connection program has had a significant positive impact on student achievement, student attendance, and student behavior. The surveys also indicate a positive perception among students and teachers participating in the program. The study concluded that implementation of a service-learning program requires professional staff development, school support, and careful planning in order to be successful. (KC)

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The Effectiveness of a School Based Service-Learning Program

"Community Connection"

At a South Texas Middle School

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June 2000

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Executive Summary

The Effectiveness of a School Based Service-learning Program "Community Connection" At a South Texas Middle School

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Sandra Zuniga

This study evaluated the effectiveness of the service-learning based Community Connection Program at Baker Middle School. The researchers wish to determine whether the program is accomplishing its stated objectives and impacting student achievement, student attendance, student perception toward self, school, and community.

Today's educators deal with a diverse student population. Students are influenced not only by their peers, but also by societal influences. With all the new challenges educators face, they must be find better teaching methodologies to help students succeed. Research indicates that service-learning seems to be a positive factor in helping students become successful.

The sample was from the target population of 8th grade students who participated in the Community Connection program during the 1999-2000 academic school year. Research included interviews with teachers and administrators.

Data collected included the literature reviewed, student and teacher survey responses, notes from site observations, disciplinary records, attendance records, and TAAS Reading and Math TLI scores. The data collected for this study provided vital information to determine the effectiveness of the Community Connection program.

The researchers developed two surveys. The topics for the survey were based on questions previously researched in the review of literature and service learning evaluations. Both the student survey and the teacher survey dealt with issues regarding student achievement, student attendance, student behavior and perceptions of the Community Connection program.

The findings of the study indicate that the Community Connection program has had a significant impact on student achievement, student attendance, and student behavior. The surveys also indicate a positive perception among students and teachers participating in the Community Connection program.

When planning a service-learning based program such as Community Connection, professional staff development, school support and careful planning are important factors contributing to success.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Recent headlines provide ample testimony of the pressures school children face at every socioeconomic level, in every age group and across rural, suburban and urban areas. Many factors contribute to these pressures. Easy access to guns, violent movies and video games, poor and destructive parenting, social upheavals in schools, and minority status are all enablers to the pressures children face. Educators and others need to create a learning environment in which young people can experience structure in their lives, receive emotional support, have clear expectations, and understand the consequences for inappropriate behavior (Education Commission of the States, 1999).

Service learning is an instructional strategy that can be implemented in all schools by allowing students to take an active role in their learning by serving the community. The National and Community Service Act of 1990 defines service learning as a method:

- in which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs;
- that is integrated into students' academic curriculum or provides structured time for a student to think, talk, or write about what that student did and saw during the service activity;
- that provides students chances to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities; and
- that enhances teaching in school by extending student learning into the community and helps foster a sense of caring for others (Burns, 1998).

Learning by serving others has long been viewed as a means for improving education. As far back as the early 1900's, John Dewey, a service-learning advocate, felt that students would learn more effectively if actively engaged in learning by serving others and integrating this strategy into the curriculum (Boydston, 1984). Above all, students can see first-hand that they can impact and connect with their communities in a positive manner. Service learning can be the connective tie between youth and the community necessary to address societal issues.

Problem Statement

Educating today's children has become increasingly difficult. Children face many societal challenges, such as family issues, school and gang violence, drug use, poverty, and teen pregnancy that make learning almost impossible. Keeping students in school and focused in a positive direction is a major concern for many educators. In searching for answers, schools have turned to various programs and unique teaching methodologies.

Incorporating service learning into the school curriculum is a growing area of interest for educators. School-based service learning programs have proliferated by almost 3700 % within the last fifteen years, and almost six million secondary students participate in service learning programs across the nation (Shumer and Cook, 1999). One type of program, community service has been recognized by schools as an opportunity to expose students to societal needs. Community service programs generally do not include explicit learning objectives or organized reflection activities and participation may be either mandatory or voluntary (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999).

Another type of program, service learning, goes beyond the community-learning model by applying an interdisciplinary instructional approach that facilitates student learning and helps students form connective ties with the community. Service learning students are not merely participants; they are actively engaged in a structured learning process. The challenge to keep students motivated and actively engaged in school is a major problem faced by educators all over the nation. Educators are asking themselves, "What can I do to keep students excited and engaged in their learning experiences?" Service learning may be the answer.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate Community Connection - a school-based service-learning program implemented in a local South Texas middle school. The researchers wish to determine whether the program is accomplishing its stated objectives and impacting student achievement, student attendance, student perception toward self, school, and community. This program provides meaningful opportunities for 8th grade students to form connective ties with the community through service. Its purpose is to develop learning experiences that (1) promote an ethic of service; (2) help students feel a sense of accomplishment; (3) develop responsive students to civic duty; (4) enhance the learning process. The Community Connection program maintains specific goals:

- Promote student accountability and school quality
- Enhance parent/school communication and cooperation
- Recognize students for community service projects
- Offer students an opportunity to enter high school with realistic life and academic goals

- Provide a rewarding and motivating school setting (Baker Middle School, 2000).

This study will focus on the following research questions:

1. Do students participating in a school-based service-learning program show achievement gains in reading and math over the previous year as measured by TLI scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test?
2. Do students participating in a school-based service-learning program have higher attendance rates than in the previous year as measured by official attendance records?
3. Do students participating in a school-based service-learning program have lower incidences of behavior problems than the previous year as measured by discipline referral records?
4. Do students participating in the Community Connection program have a positive perception of self, school and community as measured by a student survey?
5. Do teachers participating in the Community Connection program have a positive perception of the program as measured by a teacher survey?

Significance of the Study

Today's educators deal with a diverse student population. Students are influenced not only by their peers, but also by societal influences. With all the new challenges educators face, they must be find better teaching methodologies to help students succeed. Research indicates that service-learning seems to be a positive factor in helping students become successful. By forming connective ties to the community, students are able to make a difference.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to 8th grade students enrolled at Baker Middle School in Corpus Christi, Texas. Generalizations derived from this study were confined to the 8th grade students participating in the Community Connection, a program that integrates service-learning methodology.

Definition of Terms

- **Attendance.** Attendance is the presence of a student on days when school is in progress.
- **Community Service.** Community service refers to the act of providing a service to the community without pay. "Some people use it as a general term similar to youth service. However, it is also used for court- ordered or alternative sentencing programs, which can create misunderstandings" (Points of Light Foundation, 1995).
- **Community Connection.** Community Connection is a service-learning school based program designed to help students understand the importance of classroom curriculum as it relates to the skills required for success in the workplace (Baker Middle School, 1999).
- **Discipline Referral.** A discipline referral is a document that is used by a teacher to refer a student to a higher authority for discipline.
- **Planning/Preparation.** Preparation and planning is the first component in service learning. There is a collaborative effort between students, educators, and community members to address real needs.

- **Recognition.** Recognition refers to the act of recognizing one for an achievement or service.
- **Reflection.** Reflection promotes thoughtful exploration of experiences and helps learners make decisions that have greater potential for positive outcomes (England and Spence, 1999).
- **Service-Learning.** Youth are involved in helping others, but a particular emphasis is placed on the learning that occurs through the service. Service is connected to learning in the classroom and provides an opportunity for students to form connective ties with the community.
- **TAAS.** Texas Assessment of Academic Skills – An assessment instrument measuring achievement levels in the areas of Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies.
- **TEKS.** Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills.
- **TLI.** The Texas Learning Index is a statistic that allows for comparison both across years and across grades within a subject area for reading and mathematics at Grades 3-8 and exit level. The TLI score indicates whether a student has met minimum expectations/passed and how far the student's achievement is above or below the passing standard.

Chapter II

Review of Relevant Literature

Background information is organized under the following topics to lay the groundwork for the foundation of this study:

- Definition of Service Learning;
- Community Service vs. Service Learning;
- Rationale behind Service Learning;
- Integrating and Implementing Service Learning;
- Essential Components of Service Learning;
- Research in the Field of Service Learning.

Definition of Service Learning

Service learning has many definitions, but the common thread is the concept that students form connective ties to the community through thoughtfully planned activities. Service-learning as defined in the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993:

- Helps students or participants learn and develop by participating in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of a community;
- Is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education or community service program, and with the community;
- Helps to foster civic responsibility;
- Is integrated into and enhances students' academic curriculum or the education components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled;

- Provides structured time for students or other participants to reflect on the service experience (Gomez, 1999).

The National Center for Education Statistics defines service learning as a curriculum-based community service that integrates classroom instruction with community service activities. The service must:

- Be organized in relation to an academic course or curriculum;
- Have clearly stated learning objectives;
- Address real community needs in a sustained manner over a period of time; and
- Assist students in drawing lessons from the service through regularly scheduled, organized reflection or critical analysis activities, such as classroom discussions, presentations, or directed writing (National Center For Education Statistics, 1999).

As the name implies, service learning is different from community service in that it has two inseparable components: service and learning. Service learning is typically defined as a pedagogical technique for combining authentic community service with integrated academic outcomes. The premise is that students' involvement in community service can also contribute to their learning and growth. Service learning is considered not only a way to revitalize schools and their community connections, but also a way to engage students and prompt them to use knowledge rather than simply possess information. Some supporters suggest that the balance between service learning and academic learning in schools must shift, with service learning becoming an integral part of the school curriculum rather than an extracurricular activity (Moore and Sandholtz, 1999). Service learning is a method by which students learn and develop a thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of a community. It is

coordinated with an institution of higher education and with the community; helps foster civic responsibility; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students enrolled; and includes structured time for the students to reflect on the service experience. An important distinction noted by scholars between "volunteering" and established service learning programs is the potential for service learning to be more fully integrated into existing curricula (Corbett and Kendall, 1999).

Community Service vs. Service Learning

There is a distinction between community service and service learning. In community service, a student organization may decide to spend Saturday cleaning up the neighborhood park and adjacent woods. The experience is not related to course curriculum and the school and the teachers are not involved in planning, organizing, or supervising. Student may receive some credit for their involvement or be recognized by the school, but there is no connection to classroom activities or assessment. Reflection, a major component in service learning, is absent in this type of community service (Anderson and Murphy, 1999). School districts across the nation have added community service as a graduation requirement based on the perception that students need to be socially responsible. However, they have failed to link the experience to the curriculum. Without the structure service learning provides, mandated community service becomes controversial and is often times linked with the community service commonly used by the judicial system. Consequently, community service my be perceived by many as a punishment for a criminal activity (Burns, 1998). In a service-learning program, students first prepare for their experience by studying the ecology and environment of the area and determining a "real" community need. Teachers, school administrators, and the students

develop the curriculum around the problem, determine the site and the work to be done, complete the work and develop a follow-up action plan to maintain the area. Students are assessed on their knowledge of the issue and their participation. Teachers and students take part in reflection activities to understand the importance of their work, evaluate how well they worked together and met their obligations, and discuss the importance of their civic duty and how they grew as individuals. This service activity could be tied to science, speech and/or composition curriculum and to standards adopted by the school (Anderson and Murphy, 1999).

Rationale Behind Service Learning

"Service learning enriches the lives of all students" (Duckenfiled & Swanson, 1992). This unique teaching methodology provides developmental opportunities that promote personal, social, intellectual growth, as well as civic responsibility and career awareness. In order to make a smooth and successful transition from adolescence to adulthood, the following areas must be met: personal growth, social growth, intellectual growth, citizenship, and preparation for the world of work. (1) Personal growth applies to self-improvement and self-actualization. Service learning helps students build self-confidence and self-esteem. Achieving a sense of identity is gained through participation in meaningful activities. Service leaning also allows students to experience new roles. (2) Social growth includes the social skills that are necessary for relating to others in society. Communication skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, a sense of caring for others, peer group affiliation are but a few of the ways students experience social growth through active participation in service learning projects/programs. (3) Intellectual growth encompasses cognitive skills to strengthen academic learning and attain higher level

thinking skills. In the preparation and planning phase of service learning, students use problem solving skills and decision-making skills to assess and evaluate their projects. Students also develop a positive attitude toward learning and begin to understand the relevance of the curriculum. (4) Citizenship refers to the responsibilities of participation in a diverse and multicultural society and of citizenship in a democratic society. As students participate in service learning projects, a sense of awareness of community needs is acquired. Students become empowered to lead and make a difference in their communities. (5) Preparations for the world of work are the skills that help students gain work experience and career awareness. Service learning projects require skills to help students for the world of work. Human service skills are provided through a variety of projects. Students also begin to understand expectations of many careers as well as realistic ideas about the world of work. The ability to follow directions and be a team player is incorporated into service learning projects. Participation in service learning helps children grow, learn, and become productive individuals (Duckenfiled & Swanson, 1992). In a recent study conducted by the United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, public schools with service-learning were asked to select their three most important reasons for encouraging students in service-learning from a list of ten potential reasons. The reasons ranged from improving student achievement in core academic courses to helping students become more active members of the community. The most frequently cited reasons for encouraging students to participate in service learning focused on the students' relationship with the community.

The top three reasons for encouraging students to participate in service learning were the following:

1) To help students become more active members of the community,
2) To increase student knowledge and understanding of the community,
3) To meet real community needs and or foster relationships between the school and surrounding community (National Center For Education Statistics, 1999).

Integrating and Implementing Service Learning

Service learning projects and activities can be integrated into all curricular areas, not just the basic four core curricular areas: mathematics, language arts, science and social studies. Through integration, service learning can help students learn about the environment, friendships, health, homeless people, hunger, literacy, people with special needs, politics and government, safety, and senior citizens (Lewis, 1995). By tying service learning to the curriculum, educators are helping to make the subject matter become more relevant to the needs of the learner.

> For example, a student in a social studies class who spends time in a homeless shelter tutoring younger children or serving meals develops an emotional and human connection with the course concepts. Homelessness is no longer just a vocabulary word; it is a complex issue with sounds, smells, emotions as well as a lesson in history, geography, and economics. Service-learning is not a form of "make work" or simply "students doing good things in the community"; it involves learning and using real academic skills, performing needed service and producing real results that command respect (Education Commission of the States 1999).

Implementing service learning into school curriculum can be achieved in a number of different ways. Schools may elect to involve every student on campus by having a school wide service-learning program or one or two grade levels may be selected to participate. Some schools have opted to integrate service projects through individual academic classes (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). Research indicates that nationwide, 83 percent of public schools with service learning offered some type of support to teachers interesting in integrating service learning into the curriculum. In support of service-learning, General Colin Powell, U.S.A. (Ret.), Chairman of America's Promise states "Service learning is a particularly fertile way of involving young people in community service, because it ties helping others to what they are learning in the classroom. It enables them to apply academic disciplines to practical, everyday problems. In the process, it provides a compelling answer to the adolescent's perennial question, "Why do I need to learn this stuff?" (Learning In-Deed, 2000).

Essential Components of Service Learning

The four components common to service learning – preparation, service, reflection, and recognition – are a solid foundation to plan and implement service-learning projects.

Planning/Preparation

The needs of the community must be assessed and learner outcomes must be established. Identifying the knowledge and skills of the core curriculum to be learned through the service-learning project is significant. Teachers, students, community members and outside organizations are involved in the preparation stage.

Service

Service learning sponsors/teachers should facilitate in the development of the knowledge and skills needed by the students to initiate and complete the service- learning project. In the action stage of service learning, students should work together to assess the project and its progress, as well as correct and adjust strategies. The service must be engaging and meaningful.

Reflection

Reflection, the conscious act of deliberation, is an integral part of service-learning. "In service-learning courses/projects, students participate in a service activity for a nonprofit organization and then "reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and enhances sense of civic responsibility" (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Reflection becomes ongoing throughout the service-learning project. It allows students to evaluate and assess the service-learning project as well as connect and link activities to the curriculum. Furthermore, reflection offers students opportunities to learn about the process of learning, recognize what they have learned and affirm their learning. Reflecting on a service-learning experience may be done through (1) Writing- journals, essays, plays, stories, poems, letters, etc.; (2) Speaking- presentations, discussions, debates; (3) Performing – role playing, producing a video, dance, music; (4) Visual Arts – painting, drawing, sculptures, scrapbooks (The Texas Center for Service, Learning, p. 34, 1999).

Recognition

Recognition is a component that allows students to share their successes with peers, and the community. It also recognizes each child and their accomplishments.

Certificates of achievement, special trips, and school assemblies are just but a few ways in which students can be recognized for their efforts (Burns, 1998).

Research in the Field of Service Learning

The popularity of service learning has resulted in numerous articles reporting claims about its impact on a number of variables such as student achievement, community awareness, social and personal growth. The observed effects of service learning vary from study to study. Search Institute researchers in partnership with the National Youth Leadership Council conducted a study to examine the effects of middle school learning programs. Three schools in Kentucky, Massachusetts, Missouri participated in the study during the 1996-1997 school year. In studying more than 1000 6th through 8th grade students, the following key results were found. The service- learning students maintained their concern for others, and decreased only slightly on how often they talked to parents about school. In contrast, the control group students decreased their concern for others and decreased their communication with parents about school. However, in examining the number of hours students spent in service learning programs, more provocative results were found. Students who had more than 31 hours of service learning, had much reflection, and thought that the service-learning program had motivated them to become more interested in their coursework.

Service learning students:

- Significantly improved their sense of duty to others
- Significantly improved their sense that they could make a difference and impact others

- Maintained their feeling that the school provided developmental opportunities such as decision making, problem solving and recognition from adults
- Improved in pursuing good grades (Scales, 1999).

The Search Institute initiated a quantitative study on the impact of service-learning programs in 1992. Over 100 invitations were sent out to schools who were Generator Schools or who had been trained by the Youth National Leadership Council. In the end only 10 programs provided data to complete the study. The survey included a number of questions, which asked youth to agree or disagree with a series of statements about service- learning. Whereas other questions asked youth about the nature of relationships formed through their service-learning experiences. In this study 42% of the youth surveyed indicated that they got to know people they helped very well or somewhat well during their experience. Overall, 54% of youth strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that they "felt highly involved in what they were doing". On the area of perceived impact on feelings, skills, and thinking, 56% of the youth surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "My service-learning activities showed me how good it feels to help people". Although this study surveyed only a small sample of the many students involved in service-learning nation wide, this study provided insight into how youth perceive service-learning programs. This study highlighted three major findings:

- Many youth in these programs see the benefits of service-learning classes or projects over regular classes.
- The nature and the type of service programs can make a difference in some outcomes if they are designed to do so.

- Service learning used in the regular classroom has the potential to help youth at-risk and those disengaged from school from falling further away (Blyth, Saito and Berkas, 1997).

CHAPTER III

Methodology

A multi-method approach was used in this study to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The combination of methodologies consisted of a student survey, teacher survey and field research. The two surveys were used:

1. To quantify the responses of Community Connection teacher and student perceptions of the program's effectiveness; and
2. To provide information about the school's program in regard to achievement, attendance, behavior, attitude, and parental involvement.

The qualitative data gathered through the field research was used to gain insights into the meaning of the quantitative survey results.

Research Design

For the purposes of this study, a cross sectional survey was utilized. This design was selected by the researchers to investigate a relationship between the students participating in the Community Connection program and variables of interest: achievement, attendance, and behavior.

The researchers developed two surveys. The teacher survey, a one-page Lickert scale survey (Appendix A) consisting of eleven questions, was constructed in a Scantron readable format. Community Connection teachers were asked to mark the most appropriate response to each question based on the instructions provided. The topics for the survey were based on questions previously researched in the review of literature and service learning evaluations. Additional space on the bottom of the survey was provided

to illicit qualitative responses regarding the quality of the service-learning program at the school.

The eleven questions in the teacher survey dealt with the effectiveness of the Community Connection program in the following areas: (a) academic performance, (b) absenteeism, (c) disciplinary referrals, (d) students' attitudes towards school, (e) students' attitudes towards themselves, (f) students' attitudes towards other students, (g) parental involvement, (h) student diversity, (i) service learning integration into the curriculum, (j) reflective opportunities, and (k) meeting real community needs. Participating teachers were asked to rate the effectiveness of the Community Connection on a five-point scale: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) disagree, (4) strongly agree, or (5) don't know.

The second survey, a one-page yes/no format student survey (Appendix B) consisting of seven questions, was constructed in a Scantron readable format. Community Connection students were asked to mark the most appropriate response to each question based on the instructions provided. The topics for the survey were based on questions previously researched in the review of literature and service learning evaluations. The student questions correlated to teacher survey in regards to academic achievement, attendance, behavior, self-esteem, relationships with others and altruism. Additional space on the bottom of the survey was provided for qualitative responses regarding the most important thing that students learned by participating in the Community Connection program.

The questions to each survey instrument were determined through discussion conducted with a Community Connection program teacher, a university research analyst and a review of sample surveys found in the literature review. Modifications were made

to the instrument based on feedback provided to ensure that the instrument's questions measured what they were intended to measure consistently to permit the appropriate interpretation of the responses.

Procedures

Sample Selection

Baker Middle School is a magnet school that serves both neighborhood students, and district Gifted and Talented students through the Athena program. The Community Connection program has been implemented to serve only neighborhood students and not students in the Athena program. For the purpose of this study, 120, 8th grade neighborhood community students were selected. Thus, the students selected for the sample were from the target population of 1999-2000 8th grade students participating in the Community Connection program at Baker Middle School.

Data Collection

The researchers visited the middle school on several occasions to meet with Community Connection teachers and administrators. Teacher surveys and student surveys were given to the assistant principal. Classroom teachers were asked to administer the surveys during class time. A researcher collected the surveys. A total of 120 student surveys and 19 teacher surveys were administered to participants of the Community Connection program. Descriptive statistics will be used to quantify the data received. Frequencies will be run for each of the survey answers to determine the teachers' and students' perceptions of the Community Connection program.

In order to gain information on the Community Connection students, researchers were given authorization to examine attendance records, disciplinary referrals, and TAAS

scores for the 7th grade students during the 1998-1999 school year and the 8th grade students during 1999-2000 school year. A paired sample T-test procedure was run to compare the means of the three variables for the group. This statistical procedure was selected because the researchers examined specific students before and after the treatment - Community Connection.

Chapter IV

Results of Data Analysis

Analysis of Data

The level of effect that student service-learning projects have on communities is of interest and should be considered. As students are encouraged to participate in service and as students recognize the benefits of improving the well being of others, educating others, and providing social and other opportunities in the community, efforts should be made to determine the extent to which these benefits actually occurred.

For the purposes of this study, both quantitative and qualitative data was analyzed. Current Community Connection participants' attendance records, disciplinary referrals, and TAAS scores were analyzed for the 98-99, and the 99-00 school years. A paired sample T-test was run to compare the means of the three variables for the group. This statistical procedure was selected because the researchers examined specific students before and after the treatment. Surveys were also distributed and administered by program coordinators. There was a 100% response from the 120 eighth grade Community Connection students in the sample. Nineteen teacher surveys were completed and returned.

Data analysis will be discussed in the following manner: First, the results of the data will be presented in relation to each research question. Second, an overall generalization of the results will be made to provide a description of students' and teachers' perspectives on the effectiveness of the Community Connection program.

Summary of Results on Research Questions

Research Question #1:

Do students participating in a school-based service-learning program show achievement gains over the previous year as measured by TLI scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test?

Figure 1

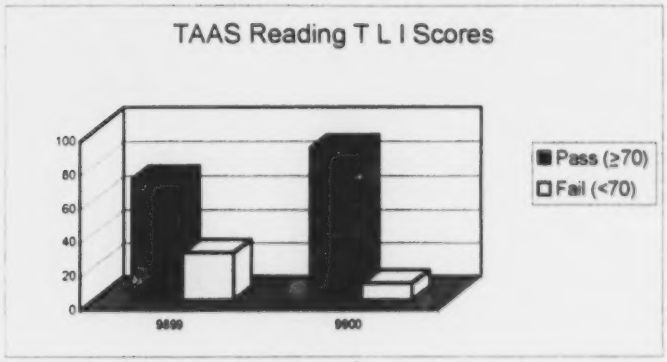
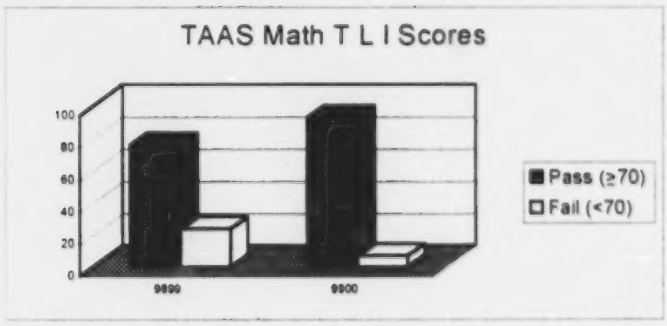


Figure 2



Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) scores of eighth grade Community Connection students were compared to the scores made the previous year on the seventh grade TAAS tests. Pass/Fail categories were formulated to sort data: A score of 70 or above is considered a passing Texas Learning Index (TLI) score; a score under 70 is

considered failing. The data was broken up into two groups: 1) The 1998-1999 school year; and 2) the 1999-2000 school year.

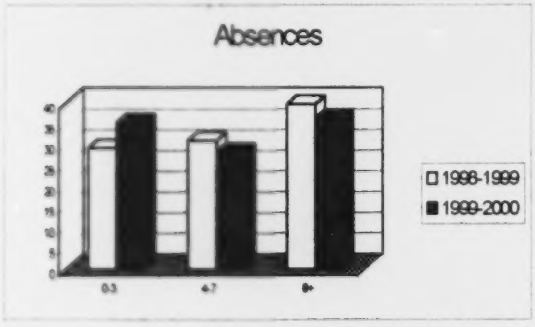
Group one represented TAAS Reading scores of Community Connection students. In the seventh grade, 71.7% of these students passed the Reading section of the TAAS test; 28.3% failed the Reading section. Those same 99 students were examined in the second group, representing the 1999-2000 school year. In the eighth grade, 89.9% of the students passed the Reading section, while 10.1% failed.

Group two represented Math scores of Community Connection students. In the seventh grade, 75.8% of these students passed the Math section of the TAAS test; 24.2% failed the Math section. Those same 99 students were examined in the second group, representing the 1999-2000 school year. In the eighth grade, 92.9% of the students passed the Math section, while 7.1% failed.

Research Question #2:

Do students participating in a school-based service-learning program have higher attendance rates than in the previous year as measured by official attendance records?

Figure 3



Attendance records of eighth grade Community Connection students were compared to their seventh grade records. Categories were formulated to sort absences:

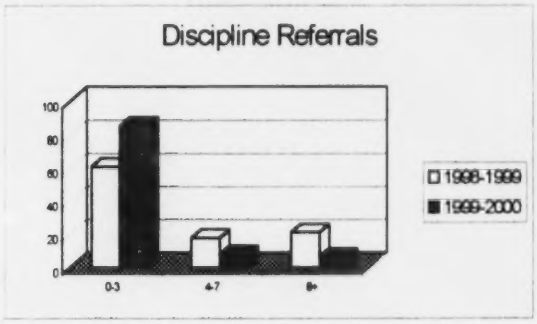
category one was 0-3 absences, category two represented 4-7 absences, and category three represented 8 or more absences. The data was broken up into two groups: 1) 98-99 school year; and 2) 99-00 school year.

Group one represented absences of 113 students in the 98-99 school year, with absences ranging from 0 to 8 or more. In the seventh grade, 29.2% of the students had 0-3 absences, 31% had absences in the 4-7 range, and the largest percentage, 39.8%, had 8 or more absences. Those same 113 students were examined in the second group, representing the 99-00 school year. Again, absences ranged from 0 – 8 or more. 35.4% of the students had 0-3 absences, 28.3% of the students had 4-7 absences, and the 8 or more group represented 36.3% of the students.

Research Question #3:

Do students participating in a school-based service-learning project have lower incidences of behavior problems than the previous year as measured by discipline referral records?

Figure 4



Discipline referral records of eighth grade Community Connection students were compared to their seventh grade records. Categories were formulated to sort discipline

referrals: category one was 0-3 referrals, category two represented 4-7 referrals, and category three represented 8 or more referrals. The data was broken up into two groups: 1) 98-99 school year; and 2) 99-00 school year.

Group one (98-99 school year) represented discipline records of 113 students with office referrals ranging from 0 to 8 or more. In the seventh grade, 61.1% of the students had 0-3 referrals, 17.7% had referrals in the 4-7 range, and the largest percentage, 21.2%, had eight or more referrals. Group two (99-00 school year) represented discipline records of those same 113 students with office referrals ranging from 0 to 8 or more. Again, referrals ranged from 0 – 8 or more. The data indicated that 85.8% of the students had 0-3 referrals, 8.0% of the students had 4-7 referrals, and 6.2% of the students had 8 or more referrals.

Research Question #4:

Do students participating in a school-based service- learning program have positive perceptions of self, community, and school, as measured by a student survey?

Student surveys were distributed among eighth graders, currently participating in Baker Middle School's Community Connection program (n=120). Respondents were asked to answer the following questions with a "yes" or "no" answer. The survey also included an open-ended statement, allowing students an opportunity to write about the most important thing learned in the Community Connection program. Table 1 indicates student responses.

Table 1

Student Survey Results

Question	Yes	No
1. The Community Connection program has helped me improve my grades.	32.5%	67.5%
2. The Community Connection program has helped me feel better about attending school.	70%	30%
3. The Community Connection program has helped me improve my behavior.	75%	25%
4. The Community Connection program has helped me feel better about school.	56.7%	43.3%
5. The Community Connection program has helped me feel better about myself.	77.5%	22.5%
6. The Community Connection program has helped me get along with others	85.8%	14.2%
7. The Community Connection program has helped me care about helping others.	90%	10%

The results of the student survey clearly reveal a positive perception of the Community Connection program. Students overwhelmingly answered "yes" on the seven survey statements. The most significant aspect of the results was the fact that 90% of students surveyed indicated that the Community Connection program helped them care about helping others.

Qualitative data from the students' surveys indicated that emotional satisfaction was seen as a personal benefit. The emotional high associated with helping others and

with truly making a difference in peoples' lives was valuable for improving self-esteem and self-motivation. A greater percentage of students associated emotional satisfaction with personal benefits of service projects. Fewer students associated addressing societal needs with personal benefits, but perhaps this was because that concept was recognized more as a benefit to other people and the community after performing a service

Students participating in the Community Connection program indicated the following responses on the student survey:

- "A lot of people in the community are less fortunate and need help,"
- "I learned to get along with people,"
- "I learned how to respect others and be more mature."
- "Helping people in the community is a great responsibility and I'm just glad that I can participate and take action in the process."
- "This program has helped me care about others."
- "Helping others is one of the greatest things that I can do. Helping others has really helped me out at school and at home."

Finally, a student bluntly wrote, " No matter what anybody says, I learned that I can amount to anything in this world I want to be."

Research Question #5:

Do teachers participating in the Community Connection program have a positive perception on the effectiveness of the program, as measured by a teacher survey?

A teacher survey was formulated and distributed to participating Community Connection teachers (n=19). Respondents were asked to answer items placed on a Likert

scale, with possible responses being (1) Strongly Agree; (2) Agree; (3) Disagree; (4) Strongly Disagree; and (5) Don't Know. Teachers were asked to rate the following in order to gain insight about their perceptions of the program:

Table 2

Student Survey Results

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
1.The Community Connection Program in my school increases academic performance.	21.1%	47.4%	5.3%	10.5%	15.8%
2. The Community Connection Program in my school reduces absenteeism	15.8%	57.9%	0%	15.8%	10.5%
3. The Community Connection Program in my school reduces disciplinary referrals.	15.8%	47.4%	10.5%	10.5%	15.8%
4. The Community Connection Program in my school changes students' attitudes towards school.	26.3%	52.6%	0%	10.5%	10.5%
5. The Community Connection Program in my school has a positive impact on students' attitudes towards themselves.	42.1%	42.1%	0%	10.5%	5.3%
6. The Community Connection Program in my school changes students' attitudes toward other students in a positive manner.	15.8%	52.6%	10.5%	10.5%	10.5%

Table 2 (Cont.)

Student Survey Results

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
7. The Community Connection Program in my school has increased parental involvement.	26.3%	42.1%	5.3%	0%	26.3%
8. The Community Connection Program in my school includes a multicultural, gender, socio-economic status and diverse group of students.	26.3%	57.9%	10.5%	0%	5.3%
9. The Community Connection Program in my school integrates service-learning methodology into the school curriculum.	36.8%	52.6%	10.5%	0%	0%
10. The Community Connection Program in my school provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their service through a variety of modes (e.g. , journal writing, presentations, photo essays, surveys.)	31.6%	47.4%	10.5%	0%	10.5%
11. The Community Connection Program in my school helps to meet real community needs and or fosters relationships between the school and the community.	52.6%	42.1%	5.3%	0%	0%

The results of the teacher survey indicates that over 60% of the teachers surveyed answered "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" to all eleven statements. This indicates an overwhelmingly strong support for the Community Connection program. The teacher surveys indicate several significant findings:

- The Community Connection program is serving a diverse population.
- Students' attitudes are positive towards school because of Community Connection.
- Over 84% of teachers feel that the Community Connection program has a positive impact on students' attitudes towards themselves.
- Of the teachers surveyed, 95% "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" that the Community Connection program helps to meet real community needs and fosters relationships between the school and the community.

Qualitative data from the teachers' surveys indicated a strong support for the Community Connection program. This commentary from a teacher at Baker Middle School complements the comments made by Baker Middle School students,

> "This program has allowed our students to mature and become more responsible. They now realize the importance of an education. They care now about how people perceive them. They know how to act appropriately in a given situation. This program has also made them more responsible for their academics. They now feel a need to succeed. They don't want to work for minimum wages anymore. They are now striving for greater heights. One student told me how she used to hate coming to school. Because of our program, she looks forward to school and even explains the importance of a good education to her nieces and nephews."

Viewed from another perspective, the integration of service-learning into the Baker Middle School curriculum has been shown through the comment of yet another teacher,

> "The Community Connection program is "A+" at Baker. Our strengths are academics and social reform. We help the students learn appropriate behavior and test taking skills to help them become successful outside and inside the classroom."

Chapter V

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the a school-based service-learning project implemented in a local South Texas middle school to determine whether the program is accomplishing its stated objectives of promoting an ethic of service; helping students feel a sense of accomplishment; developing responsive students to civic duty; and enhancing the learning process. The impact of student achievement, student attendance, student discipline, and student perceptions towards self, school, and community were also evaluated.

Research Question #1:

Do students participating in a school-based service-learning program show achievement gains over the previous year as measured by TLI scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test? Figure 1 and 2 indicate that students who participated in the Community Connection program at Baker Middle School made a significant gain. The failure rate decreased on TAAS reading and math.

Research Question #2:

Do students participating in a school-based service-learning program have higher attendance rates than in the previous year as measured by official attendance records? In the seventh grade, 29.2% of the students had 0-3 absences. This percentage increased for the same students during their eighth grade year to 35.4%. The findings indicate that number of absences decreased for students participating in the Community Connection program.

Research Question #3:

Do students participating in a school-based service-learning project have lower incidences of behavior problems than the previous year as measured by discipline referral records? The findings indicate that there was a reduction of discipline referrals among students participating in the Community Connection program. Discipline referral records of eighth grade students were compared to their seventh grade year. In the seventh grade, 61.1% of the students had 0-3 absences. This percentage increased during the eighth grade year for those same students to 85.8%. This gain of 24.7% suggests that students decreased the number of referrals during the eighth grade year while participating in the Community Connection program

Research Question #4:

Do students participating in a school-based service- learning program have positive perceptions of self, community, and school, as measured by a student survey? The findings of the students' surveys indicate a strong belief and support of the Community Connection program. Students seemed to feel "good" about participating in the program. The results indicate a deep impact in the students' affective domain. The words "Caring", "Helping", and "Service" permeated throughout the qualitative section of the students' surveys. The perceptions of the students' surveys can best be summed up in the words of a Community Connection participant, "Helping others is one of the greatest things that I can do. Helping others has really helped me out at school and at home."

Research Question #5:

Do teachers participating in the Community Connection program have a positive perception on the effectiveness of the program, as measured by a teacher survey? Over 63% of the teachers surveyed "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" to the eleven statements in the teacher survey. This fact indicates a strong support and positive perception for the Community Connection program. An overwhelming majority of teachers participating in the Community Connection feel that the program is impacting students in a positive way and making a difference in students' lives.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that the service-learning based Community Connection program at Baker Middle School is effective in the areas addressed by the research questions. In the discussion of the results, meaning was given to the information gathered in this study. The quantitative data and the qualitative data strongly suggest that Community Connection is impacting students in a positive manner with regards to achievement levels, attendance, behavior and student perceptions of self, school and community. The student surveys provided valuable insight into students' perceptions of the program. The study also suggests that the program is reaching students. The Community Connection school based service-learning program at Baker Middle School is meeting its goals and its stated objectives. The results of this study clearly reveal that students are indeed making gains on the TAAS test in the areas of reading and math. Students participating in the Community Connection program are improving attendance and behavior at school. One of the most important findings of this study is that 90% of students surveyed indicated that this program has helped them care about helping others

in need. Service- learning programs, such as the Community Connection program, seem to help students gain self-confidence and understand how they can impact the community around them. Forming connective ties to the community helps students feel that they belong and they can make a difference in the lives of others.

Recommendations

Based on that discussion the following recommendations will be made to assist schools interested in implementing a service-learning project such as "Community Connection". Recommendations are based on the results of the findings and related literature.

The first recommendation is that all educators who integrate and implement service-learning activities participate in service-learning professional development. This allows teachers to develop an understanding of service-learning components, history, and impact. Professional development in the area of service-learning also allows educators to obtain the tools necessary to make real world issues a part of education. Encouraging students to "think out of the box" fosters development of problem solving skills.

A second recommendation is that if school districts want service-learning to impact students, schools, and the community then districts must actively support service –learning activities by providing support systems, guidance, and financial resources. The data in this study suggests that students who participate in service-learning activities improve attendance, behavior and TAAS achievement levels. Therefore, school districts benefit by supporting service-learning activities. Service-learning grants are available from Education Service Center-Region 2, Corpus Christi, Texas. Grants vary from.

$2000.00 to $10,000.00. In order to access grants, the district must provide technical assistance for service-learning educators.

A third recommendation is that educators carefully plan of all service-learning activities. Troubleshooting problems before they occur helps the entire program. Communication is the key to the success of any program. Program goals and objectives need to be communicated effectively to all stakeholders: parents, students, teachers, community members, and administrators.

A last recommendation is that schools study the National Service-Learning Cooperative's Essential elements of Service Learning (Appendix D) when implementing service-learning programs. The essential elements provide a framework for service-learning programs. They are based on service-learning research and are a valuable resource for organizations interested in implementing service-learning programs.

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Appendix A

Service Learning
Teacher Survey

Your assistance in filling out this questionnaire is appreciated. Please do not sign your name.

Directions: Use a #2 pencil only. Darken only one response box for each item; if you feel the statement is not applicable, mark "Don't Know" box.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
1.	The Community Connection Program in my school increases academic performance.	○	○	○	○	○
2.	The Community Connection Program in my school reduces absenteeism.	○	○	○	○	○
3.	The Community Connection Program in my school reduces disciplinary referrals.	○	○	○	○	○
4.	The Community Connection Program in my school changes students' attitudes towards school.	○	○	○	○	○
5.	The Community Connection Program in my school has had a positive impact on students' attitudes towards themselves.	○	○	○	○	○
6.	The Community Connection Program in my school has had a positive impact on students' attitudes towards other students.	○	○	○	○	○
7.	The Community Connection Program in my school has increased parental involvement.	○	○	○	○	○
8.	The Community Connection Program in my school includes a multicultural, gender, socioeconomic status and diverse group of students.	○	○	○	○	○
9.	The Community Connection Program in my school integrates service-learning methodology into the school curriculum.	○	○	○	○	○
10.	The Community Connection Program in my school provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their service through a variety of modes (e.g., journal writing, presentations, photo essays, surveys.)	○	○	○	○	○
11.	The Community Connection Program in my school helps to meet real community needs and/or fosters relationships between the school and the community.	○	○	○	○	○

Please give your views on the quality of the service learning program at your school. In your comments, please include both strengths and weaknesses. Use the back of this sheet if you need more space.

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Appendix B

Service Learning
Student Survey

Your assistance in filling out this questionnaire is appreciated. Please do not sign your name.

Directions: Use a #2 pencil only. Darken only one response box for each item.

	The Community Connection Program has helped me:	Yes	No
1.	Improve my grades	O	O
2.	Feel better about attending school	O	O
3.	Improve my behavior	O	O
4.	Feel better about school	O	O
5.	Feel better about myself	O	O
6.	Get along with others	O	O
7.	Care about helping others	O	O

The most important thing that I have learned by participating in the Community Connection Program is:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Appendix C

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

College of Education

6300 Ocean Drive, Corpus Christi, Texas 78412

February 21, 2000

Dr. Abe Saavedra
Superintendent of Schools
Corpus Christi Independent School District
801 Leopard St.
Corpus Christi, TX 78401

Dear Dr. Saavedra:

The Texas A & M University - Kingsville and Texas A & M University - Corpus Christi doctoral students representing Cohort VIII, in conjunction with the South Texas Educational Research and Development Center, are performing a study and would appreciate your assistance. The study focuses on the effectiveness of Service Learning programs in Texas schools.

In order to complete our study, we need your help in gathering information about the Community Connection program at Baker Middle School. We are requesting permission to survey participating teachers and parents about their perceptions of the program's effectiveness. Responses will be strictly confidential. Access to the data from this survey will be limited to us, as the group directly involved in conducting this research. Results will be coded and used as data to present group statistics. At no time will individual responses be presented or identified.

In addition to the information we will gather through surveys, we request permission to visit Baker Middle School and gather data from participating students' records. We will specifically focus on discipline, academic, and attendance records for the 1998-99 and 1999-2000 school years. We will compile the survey responses and data collected to complete our report. We would be happy to provide your district with a copy of the completed report on the effectiveness of the Community Connection program at your request.

Thank you for your assistance on this project. If you would like additional information, please contact Joe R. Trevino at (361) 387-6504 or Stella Uribe-Moreno at (361) 394-5027. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Thomas H. Linton, Ph.D.
Executive Director, South Texas Research and Development Center

Zonia García-Obregón

Joe R. Trevino

Stella Uribe-Moreno

Sandra Zuniga

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Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

College of Education

6300 Ocean Drive, Corpus Christi, Texas 78412

Visitation Request Form

Please fill in the date and time that would be most convenient for us to come visit your campus. We need to gather information from participating Community Connection students' records (discipline, academic, and attendance). Please note an appropriate time(s) to schedule our visit.

First Choice Date _____ Time _____

Second Choice Date _____ Time _____

Third Choice Date _____ Time _____

Please return this form in the enclosed stamped self-addressed envelope. The form may also be faxed to (361)394-5005, Attn: Stella Uribe-Moreno. Thank you for your assistance in this project.

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Appendix D

National Service-Learning Cooperative's Essential Elements of Service Learning

In effective service-learning:

- There are clear educational goals that require the application of concepts, content, and skills from the academic disciplines and involve students in the construction of their own knowledge.
- Students are engaged in tasks that challenge and stretch them cognitively and developmentally.
- Assessment is used as a way to enhance student learning as well as to document and evaluate how well students have met content and skill standards.
- Students are engaged in service tasks that have clear goals, meet genuine needs in the school and community, and have significant consequences for themselves and others.
- Formative and summative evaluations are employed in a systematic evaluation of the service effort and its outcome.
- Student voice is maximized in selecting, designing, implementing, and evaluating the service project.
- Communications and interaction with the community are promoted and partnerships and collaboration are encouraged.
- Students are prepared for all aspects of their service work. They posses a clear understanding of tasks and roles, as well as the skills and information required by the tasks, awareness of safety precautions; and knowledge about and sensitivity to the people with whom they will be working.

- Student reflection takes place before, during, and after service; uses multiple methods that encourage critical thinking; and is a central force in the design and fulfillment of curricular objectives.
- Multiple methods are designed to acknowledge, celebrate and further validate students' service work (National Service Learning Cooperative, 1998).